

Message Text

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FOR UNDER SECRETARY SISCO FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR MASS EG US

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN INTEREST IN HAVING USN SWEEP

STRAITS OF GUBAL

1. YOU WILL RECALL THAT DURING THE PERIOD OF OUR SUEZ CANAL MINE CLEARANCE OPERATION, THE EGYPTIANS ALSO REQUESTED THE SOVIETS TO CLEAR THE STRAITS OF GUBAL AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE GULF OF SUEZ. THE SOVIETS COMPLETED THAT MISSION EARLY THIS YEAR, BUT THE EGYPTIANS RETAINED MISGIVINGS THAT THE STRAITS ARE NOT RPT NOT FULLY CLEARED. SOME TWO MONTHS AGO, PANAMANIAN REGISTRY VESSEL EN ROUTE TO PERSIAN GULF SUFFERED AN EXPLOSION IN THE STRAITS AREA. ALTHOUGH THE SOVIETS BELIEVE IT MUST HAVE BEEN A BOILER EXPLOSION, THE EGYPTIANS PROBABLY SUSPECT THE SHIP HIT A MINE. THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT CONTINUING UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE STRAITS OF GUBAL MAY INHIBIT USE OF THE SUEZ CANAL AND KEEP INSURANCE RATES HIGH. THEY HAVE MADE SEVERAL EFFORTS TO GET A WRITTEN CERTIFICATE FROM THE SOVIETS THAT THE STRAITS ARE CLEARED, BUT THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT BEEN WILLING TO GIVE A ONE HUNDRED PERCENT GUARANTEE. THIS HAS BEEN AN ADDITIONAL FACTOR IN STRAINED EGYPTIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS.

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SECRET

PAGE 02 CAIRO 08069 141443Z

2. DURING THE RECENT MEETING OF ADVANCE NIMBUS STREAM

TEAM AND ALUSNA WITH ADMIRAL ZIKRY TO PLAN FOR PORT SAID MINE CLEARANCE, ZIKRY HINTED THAT WE SHOULD ANTICIPATE A GOE REQUEST TO RESWEEP THE STRAITS OF GUBAL. ZIKRY ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE PURPOSE OF SUCH A GOE REQUEST WOULD PARTLY BE TO ANNOY THE SOVIETS. I HAVE INSTRUCTED MY NAVAL PEOPLE TO RESPOND TO ANY SUCH SUGGESTION BY SAYING THAT THIS IS A SUBJECT THAT HAS POLITICAL OVERTONES AND SHOULD BE DISCUSSED WITH ME. AS OF NOW, NO SUCH REQUEST HAS BEEN PUT TO ME, BUT THIS MAY STILL HAPPEN.

3. WHILE WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO TRY TO BE FORTHCOMING IN MEETING REASONABLE GOE REQUESTS, I BELIEVE WE SHOULD DENY ANY REQUEST TO RESWEEP THE STRAITS OF GUBAL, IF ONE IS MADE. TO SOME EXTENT, IT IS UNAVOIDABLE THAT WE ARE INVOLVED IN CURRENT GOE-SOVIET STRAINED RELATIONS, BUT I SEE NO VIRTUE IN OVERALL DETENTE TERMS IN PLAYING THE EGYPTIAN GAME OF DELIBERATELY OFFENDING THE SOVIETS. (THE LITTLE ROCK AFFAIR WAS ENOUGH.) MOREOVER, I UNDERSTAND THAT THE JOB OF CLEARING THE STRAITS OF GUBAL WOULD BE TECHNICALLY DIFFICULT ONE SINCE WHATEVER CRAB MINES MAY BE LEFT ARE PROBABLY ANCHORED TOO DEEPLY IN THE WATER TO BE DESTROYED BY OUR HELICOPTER SWEEPS. SHOULD THE MATTER BE RAISED WITH ME, I THINK WE COULD APPROPRIATELY REPLY THAT STRAITS HAVE ALREADY BEEN CLEARED BY SOVIETS AND WE BELIEVE ANY OUTSTANDING MATTERS CONCERNING THAT OPERATION SHOULD APPROPRIATELY BE DISCUSSED WITH THEM. WHILE I DOUBT THAT ZIKRI HAS ANY "FEEL" FOR THE POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THIS MATTER, I THINK I COULD EXPLAIN THEM TO SADAT AND FAHMY IF THIS WERE NEEDED.
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